Clearly, God created us for community, to help and support each other so that we do not face the challenges of life alone. Each of us is a creation of God, equally made in the image and likeness of God, with more in common than we think. And this made me wonder: What would mean if our church and our community were more like the “Paul O’Sullivan Band”? How would it change our world if we focused on our similarities, rather than our differences?

The apostle Paul gives us some clues. “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ,” Paul writes to the Galatians. “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:2, 10).

**Be true helpers, saving and rescuing each other.** In the Christian community, we are supposed to be strong and bold, not weak or timid, in our support for one another.

**Bear one another’s burdens.**We do this when we offer a listening ear, provide a ride to a medical appointment, give an afternoon of childcare, pay a month’s rent or a utility bill for a family in need. When we share our blessings to ease another’s burden, we are living in the spirit of true community.

**Work for the good of all.**This means working to expand the stock of affordable housing in our community; advocating for workers to receive a living wage; supporting community health clinics; ensuring our schools have the resources to provide good education for our children; spending some of our time on projects that promote the common good.

**Especially for those of the family of faith.**We show this focus when we make sure that children are welcomed fully in worship; when we create small groups for every member of the congregation; when we provide tangible help to church members facing financial difficulties, marital problems, or illnesses in body, mind, or spirit; when we create an environment where all people feel safe and welcomed.

Each of us is challenged to answer the question posed by James, the brother of Jesus: “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” Great question. The answer, of course, is, “It’s no good.” James concludes by saying, “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:15-17).

We are true helpers when we do the work of saving and rescuing, boldly bearing one another’s burdens, and supplying the bodily needs of our brothers and sisters. Once we engage in this kind of helping, we become *full partners* with one another. Together, we are so much stronger than we are as isolated individuals. As Paul says to the Corinthians, “we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This one Spirit-filled body is made up of many members, acting as full partners.

In the novel *City of Peace,* a Methodist pastor named Harley Camden makes a discovery about the power of community after a rock is thrown through the window of a local bakery owned by Muslim immigrants. “Here is what I challenge us to do today,” he said to his congregation in his Sunday sermon. “After worship, let’s walk as a group to the Riverview Bakery. Let’s walk as one body, as the body of Christ, as the physical presence of our Lord in the world today. Let’s line up and support this business as a manifestation of the Spirit, as an act that shows the reality of our love.”

Looking out over the congregation during the closing hymn, Harley felt strongly led by the Spirit of God to offer this challenge. But he was still surprised by the number of people who gathered after worship to walk to the Riverview Bakery. Of the nearly one hundred people in worship, Harley guessed that about 75 marched in support that day. The members of Harley’s church were partners, full partners, in showing love and support for their immigrant neighbors. Like members of the Paul O’Sullivan Band, they crossed the barriers of country and culture to establish supportive friendships.

As people devoted to partnership, we can reach beyond the Christian community to work with others for the *common good.* We do this because God created all the people of the world in God’s image and likeness, and because Jesus challenges us to take such action in the world. When we can see our common humanity first – before race or gender or politics or theology or citizenship – we participate as full partners with our brothers and sisters. When we can focus on our shared needs before our individual needs, we are serving the common good.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, a Jewish man is attacked by robbers, who strip him and beat him. A Jewish priest sees him and passes by on the other side. Then a Levite spots the beaten man and walks around him. But then a Samaritan comes across this Jewish man, and he is moved with pity, even though the bloody man is not a member of his faith or nationality. The Samaritan bandages the man’s wounds, brings him to an inn, cares for him, and then pays the innkeeper to continue his care. He was a full partner in restoring the man to health.

When the Jewish leaders admit that the Samaritan was a true neighbor and helper, one who crossed boundaries to save and rescue others, Jesus gives them a simple command, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). That is the command of Jesus to us as well. He wants us to go and be helpers to people around us, working in partnership with others to advance the common good. Sometimes we will do this within the church, the body of Christ. Other times, we will work with people of other faiths, or with people of no faith, to rescue and save the most vulnerable members of our communities.

In every situation, we are challenged to join the Paul O’Sullivan Band and work in harmony. This means understanding that we are not meant to live alone, but to create partnerships in which we help one another. The musical Paul O’Sullivans come from different areas, from different cultures, and from different generations. “But with us,” says Baltimore Paul, “it never mattered. Music really does bring people together.” So does helping others and working for the common good. And making beautiful music together.

An Affirmation of Unity:

We share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope. Together we come to know the height and breadth and depth of the love of Christ; are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; know and bear one another’s burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and up build one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness. Together we pray; together we serve God in this world. Amen.

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**Joining the Paul O’Sullivan Band**

Sunday, October 3, 2021 Ephesians 4:1-6, 25, 29-32

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

It is not good that a person should be alone. A man named Paul O’Sullivan sensed that this was true, so he went on Facebook and searched his own name. What popped up was a seemingly endless list of Paul O’Sullivan profiles. Clearly, Paul O’Sullivan was not alone!

As it turned out, there were tons of Paul O’Sullivans living all around the world. Paul decided to reach out to three of the strangers who shared his name, and they all responded. Although the other Pauls were skeptical at first, a bond quickly formed. Then things got interesting. Beyond their shared names, the four had a common love for music. “We should start a band,” said the first Paul.

The others agreed, even though they lived in Pennsylvania, Maryland, England, and The Netherlands. In 2016, they began to rehearse and make music virtually. And what did they call themselves? You guessed it: “The Paul O’Sullivan Band.” When the pandemic hit, band practice became a vital link to the four Pauls. Together, they recorded an album, *Internet Famous*, containing six cover songs and one original song. Band members identify themselves by their home cities: Baltimore, Pennsylvania, Manchester, and Rotterdam.

“We’ve been social distancing since 2016,” said Baltimore Paul*.*“We perfected the system of remote collaboration before it was even relevant.” Their music is intended to make you smile and make you dance. “If it does both,” says Pennsylvania Paul, “it’s the Paul O’Sullivan Band.” The four Pauls discovered a foundational biblical truth: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). In the garden of Eden, God realizes that the first man will not be able to thrive on his own, so God decides to “make him a helper as his partner” (v. 18).

The two are made equally in the image and likeness of God, and the term “helper” is in no way intended to communicate subservience. In fact, the Hebrew word for helper (*ezer*)is most often used to describe God as being a helper of human beings. Such a helper is always strong, working to save and to rescue. In the Bible, the word is used twice to describe women, three times in reference to military support, and 16 times to describe God.